

## MINUTES

Record of the Public Hearing by the Ad-Hoc Committee on Best Practices of Jan. 5, 2009. The meeting was held in the City Council Chambers and was taped by NCTV for later cable broadcast.

The meeting began at 7 PM.

Present were committee members Michael Bardsley, Alex Ghiselin, Jim Palermo, David Narkewicz and Bob Reckman. Lisa DePiano and Wendy Foxmyn were not present. Members of the public were Diane Welter, Jesse Adams, Daryl LaFleur, Ken Mitchell, John Sinton, Jesus Leyva, Mary Sereze, David Reckhow and the NCTV crew. Ken Mitchell taped the meeting for future video cast. Michael kept notes of the suggestions on newsprint pages.

Jim Palermo moderated the meeting. He began with a brief synopsis of our history. He introduced the members of the committee and described our process for generating the draft recommendations. He invited members of the public to participate as if they were members of the committee. Jim asked if there were any questions about our process. There were none.

We then moved to our draft recommendations. The first recommendation is to develop written protocols for public meetings. John Sinton asked if we were satisfied with the quality of responses from within the City. David answered by describing the process and his satisfaction with the responses. Bob seconded this, saying that he thought our in-reach process had been the most useful of our 3 information gathering efforts. Jesse said that the outreach bullet point made good sense to him. Bob explained that we had seen well developed systems in other cities to encourage this as a regular practice. Daryl LaFleur wondered about the success of our consensus model and wondered whether it could be more widely applied by City committees and board. Jim said that he thought it worked well for an advisory committee but was not sure it could be more widely applied. He thinks the courtesy and respect we demonstrated was a good practice. Michael agreed. Ken Mitchell wondered how we might ensure better public participation in all public meetings. He argued that citizens should be able to interact with City Councilors at their regular meetings. Jim Palermo, Michael Bardsley and Alex Ghiselin all responded agreeing that this was a difficult problem for which we had not found a simple solution. David pointed out that this is a problem the City Council would have to address. Michael and Bob talked about the consensus model and how it may have limited our ability to make more specific recommendations. Jesus suggested that the clerk transcribe public comments as recorded and that the Council reach out to them afterwards. Daryl suggested that we consider finding a way to let citizens talk to the entire council. He also asked if the requirements for some decisions were mandated by law. Bob explained that some planning decisions needed to be made within a fixed number of days after the public hearing was closed. Diane expressed a desire to be given a clear timeline for decisions early in the process.

The second recommendation is that the City do a better job of explaining its structure to the public. Jesse had some doubts about whether an orientation would be useful. He also suggested that City School allow citizens to attend individual sessions. Michael said that he thought information about the open meeting law would be necessary for all new City officials. Bob hopes that individual departments would also provide new members with some introductory orientation. Regular orientation for new officials would provide a good way to disseminate best practices.

The third recommendation is that the City assume an ongoing responsibility for explaining the City budget in detail. Jesse said he thinks this is a good idea. Daryl supported greater transparency in the City's budget but acknowledged that this would cost money. There was general support for making the budget more widely available and providing snapshots of spending status during the year.

The fourth recommendation is to make the City's web site more user friendly. Daryl suggested that some departments have done a good job of this, but far more could be done. The site could certainly be more interactive. Adam suggested that it would be best if people did not have to go to City Hall to see new documents. Mary suggested that adding a google search function would be helpful and easy. Diane suggested that the contract information should suggest who to contact for various types of questions.

The fifth recommendation is to review/revise the process for appointments to City Boards and Committees. Bob expressed his impression that it is sometimes difficult to find qualified volunteers. Daryl suggested that "special municipal employees" were an example of the need to balance the skills of our citizens with the small size of our City to avoid conflicts of interest. Michael said he thought that if we did better outreach it would be easier to find volunteers.

The sixth recommendation was for an independent outside review of the Office of Planning and Development. John Sinton talked about having been a planner for many years and participating in such reviews. His experience is that they can be contentious and that the professionals would need to "be the adults." He emphasized that the process of drafting RFP's need to be particularly transparent. Daryl suggested that the Planning Department needs to be careful to avoid conflicts of interest which is difficult in a small city. It is important to differentiate between policy and decision making. Ken revisited the City's decisions about the Educational Overlay District and the Kohlmorgen relocation.

The seventh recommendation is that the City create a vision/mission statement supporting wide citizen engagement, ethical behavior and best practices. There was no comment on this recommendation other than general support.

The eighth recommendation is that a standing committee be created to continue our work. There was no comment on this recommendation other than general support.

The ninth recommendation is to review the City Council rules and procedures in the light of our recommendations. This would provide another possible route for additional legal advice beyond that provided by the Mayor's appointee. The question was raised by Daryl if we should have an in-house City solicitor. Bob pointed out that for this to work it has to start with the City Council itself.

The 10th recommendation is that we undertake a comprehensive review of the City's charter. There was no comment on this other than general support.

The public was encouraged to attend the meeting of this committee at 6 PM on Thursday at the DPW when we will discuss what we have heard tonight. The meeting adjourned at 9 PM.

Respectfully submitted;

Bob Reckman